

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



Community Cultural Profiling Guide: Understanding a Community's Sense of Place

The U.S. EPA is supplementing its traditional regulatory programs with such approaches as watershed protection and community-based environmental protection (CBEP). Watershed protection focuses on protecting and restoring aquatic ecosystems and protecting human health at the watershed level.

Community-based environmental protection includes assessing and managing the quality of air, water, land and living resources in a place as a whole while integrating the environmental with the local economic and social conditions and priorities. Both approaches believe that voluntary community involvement in holistic, place-based environmental protection efforts will lead to more effective long-term protection. Understanding community social systems can be key to the success of non-regulatory approaches at the community level.

Community Cultural Profiling is a flexible process for developing a sophisticated, comprehensive understanding of the social dynamics involved in community-based efforts. Profiles reveal such things as local knowledge about community issues, the language community members use, influential subgroups within the community, historical trends in the community, and other social factors. This information is crucial in developing sustainable strategies for community participation and planning regarding environmental protection.

The *Community Cultural Profiling Guide: Understanding a Community's Sense of Place* outlines a user-friendly, step-by-step process for building a Community Cultural Profile by identifying local values, beliefs and behaviors as they relate to community life and the surrounding natural environment. It introduces the concepts of "community" and "culture", and the Guide's social science premise. It presents reasons for conducting a community profile, steps on how to proceed in a profiling project, ways to use the results for strategic planning purposes, and easy-to-use worksheets and community profiling stories from around the country.

Users of the *Guide* can choose from a list of community characteristics to investigate. Each characteristic includes a series of questions to stimulate thought about the type of information to gather. Characteristics include:

- community capacity and activism
- community interaction and information flow
- demographic information
- economic conditions and employment
- education
- environmental awareness and values
- geographic and administrative boundaries
- governance
- infrastructure and public services
- local arts, history and tradition
- local identity
- local leisure and recreation
- natural resources and landscape
- property ownership, management and planning
- public safety and health
- religious and spiritual practices

The *Guide* also describes methods for collecting needed information. The *Guide* provides detailed directions on how to use each method and provides publication references or web sites for more information. Methods include:

- census data research
- content analysis
- environmental values typology
- focus groups
- interviewing
- library data research
- maps and geographic research
- meetings
- observation
- regional economic data research
- social mapping
 - asset
 - cognitive
 - concept
 - social network
- surveys and polls
- visual methods

The *Guide* will be available in Fall 1999.

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